



Rev. Falwell aims to sign up 8 million Christians

'Get 'Em Saved and Registered' **Preachers rally to sweep aside liberal tide**

• *First in a four-part series examining the emergence of politics from the pulpit.*

By **JOE LEDLIE**
Journal Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — America's most widely telecast preacher has come to the nation's capital, launching an election-year crusade to put politics in the pulpit and turn the country around.

The Rev. Jerry Falwell has moved from the "Old-Time Gospel Hour" to New Right politics, with a plan to sign up 8 million Christian voters and put liberalism on the run this November.

"Get 'em saved, baptized and registered," says the Lynchburg, Va., minister.

His Moral Majority Inc., based in the basement of a Stanton Square townhouse, is the flagship of a fundamentalist fighting force with troops from as far away as California.

The force's other big guns are the Religious Roundtable, the National Christian Action Coalition and the Christian Voice.

Together they form a unique alliance of evangelical and right-wing leaders representing the frustrations of Middle America and stirring liberal opponents to reactions that range from skepticism to fear.

"This is a political-religious movement, and we just haven't had anything like it," said Ben Albert, a veteran left-wing editor. "It's the first nationwide public attempt by major religious spokesmen to organize for political purposes."

Fueled by direct-mail and toll-free phone donations that are the lifeblood of TV evangelism, the groups hope to mobilize an estimated 50 million American evangelicals.

Their grass-roots assault is aimed at presidential and congressional candi-

dates who fail to measure up on key issues such as abortion, homosexuality, the Equal Rights Amendment, communism and prayer in public schools.

Georgia — with an evangelical population estimated at 1.8 million — is targeted for a key role in the campaign. A Christian lobby set up last year in the state, Concerned Christians for Good Government, is affiliated with the national Moral Majority, and a couple of prominent Atlanta area ministers are involved.

With ambitious operating budgets of up to \$1 million and campaign chests up to twice that size, the four Washington groups hope to transform the spiritual power of the growing "electronic church" into a local-level tidal wave that will sweep 40 to 50 senators and congressmen from office.

Moral Majority plans to organize voter registrations and political action

See **PREACHER, 20A**

committees, using churches in hundreds of congressional districts across the country.

Religious Roundtable aims to use seminars to educate hundreds of pastors on conservative issues and political tactics.

The National Christian Action Coalition will be the "brain trust" for the other groups.

Christian Voice plans a "Christian Morality Rating" of congressmen and senators, showing how they voted on key issues.

One possible target: Sen. Herman Talmadge, whose votes on abortion and arms limitation have turned off the conservative Christians.

Other lawmakers rank higher on the Christian Voice hit list.

They include Sens. **Frank Church** of Idaho, Robert Packwood of Oregon, Alan Cranston of California, perhaps Donald Stewart of Alabama, and "maybe 30 others in the House," said Gary Jarmin, the Christian Voice lobbyist.

"You want to pick the guy who's most vulnerable," Jarmin said.

Helping out in the campaign to advance "pro-family" causes are sympathetic senators and congressmen, like Rep. Larry McDonald of Marietta. The Georgia Democrat is listed as one of the "congressional advisers" to Christian Voice.

Another is freshman Rep. Marvin Leath, a Texas banker who has made television tapes for the group. They show him explaining why Christians should get into politics.

A Presbyterian from Marlin, Texas, Leath said he was introduced to the group by Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah, another congressional adviser.

"You get a jillion requests to be on national



Jim Bakker was subject of FCC probe

groups," Leath said. "One way you judge a group is to see who's already involved."

The newcomer groups have already made waves in Washington.

Six major presidential candidates have already sat for interviews with Moral Majority.

Earlier this month, President Carter — less than a favorite with many of his fellow evangelicals — took time out to stress his born-again beliefs to a meeting of Christian broadcasters.

The next morning, he asked a dozen bigtime electronic evangelists in for grits at a White House breakfast. His guests included Falwell and Jim Bak-

'Onward Christian Voters'

The Journal's four-part examination of the Fundamentalist political movement will continue in Monday's paper. Still to come:

- *Monday: Operating out of a cramped townhouse apartment basement, Moral Majority is trying to raise \$1 million to mobilize Christian voters.*
- *Tuesday: Abortion has been the catalyst in bringing different religious groups together.*
- *Wednesday: Will the "electronic church" be a force on the campaign trail this year?*

ker of the PTL Club, a Charlotte-based Christian variety show.

It was a clear case of election-year jitters, said an official of one of Washington's old-line religious lobbies. "A distressful picture."

Such lobbyists worry about the new groups' plans for mass-mailing drives and targeting of candidates. "It's not the way we do things," one said.

Liberal opponents argue that the Christian conservatives are taking advantage of their religious base.

See PREACHER, 21A

Among the Targets



Sen. George McGovern



Sen. Frank Church



Sen. Robert Packwood



Sen. Alan Cranston

Preacher Continued from 20A

They suggest big-money clergymen like the political leverage of having their own Washington lobbies.

As television preachers and money-raisers, they face scrutiny by federal regulatory agencies like the Federal Communications Commission, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Internal Revenue Service.

Falwell himself had problems with the SEC in 1973 over \$6.6 million worth of bonds floated by his Thomas Road Baptist Church for an expansion project. As a result, the church had to reorganize its management.

Jim Bakker of the PTL Club has been the subject of an inquiry by the FCC.

"They collect money as nonprofit organizations and shift it to political purposes," said Jeff Smith, press secretary to Sen. George McGovern, a Christian Voice target.

"I would hope someone would bring a court suit against that," Smith said.

The evangelicals angrily deny they mingle funds.

"We raise money strictly as a political organization," said William Billings of the National Christian Action Coalition. "Any money given to us is not tax-deductible."

Labor is also worried about the new groups.

COPE Memo, the newsletter of the AFL-CIO's political education arm, has

sounded warnings about the Stanton Square groups in four or five issues during the last six months.

Many of the evangelicals' congressional targets are pro-labor. Albert, who is editor of the COPE Memo, dubs the groups "MPs — for morality police" and calls them "another spoke in the right-wing wheel." The groups are scattered with big names from the New Right, he said.

The evangelicals scoff at charges of New Right influence.

"I'm probably the only guy in this group that has been around politics for 10 years," said Christian Voice's Jarmin. "All of our other people are brand new."

"The vast majority of our givers are people who have never given to political causes before. They've given to Christian causes."

The same names pop up in many of the groups, said another critic, Msgr. Francis J. Lally of the National Catholic Conference, a long-established group for America's bishops.

This means "a small number of people exercises a great deal of influence," he said.

For example, Falwell is a founder of Moral Majority and a member of the Council of 56 at Religious Roundtable. (The council got its name from the 56

signers of the Declaration of Independence.)

His top staff man at Moral Majority, Dr. Robert J. Billings, is on the advisory board of Christian Voice, along with such figures as the California apocalyptic novelist, Hal Lindsey.

Billings' son, William, heads the staff at Christian Action Coalition.

The younger Billings was formerly with the secular National Conservative Political Action, Phyllis Schlafly's Stop ERA and the Conservative Leadership Youth Foundation.

Edward McAteer, a former soap sales executive in Atlanta, helped form the Religious Roundtable. He was also involved in the founding of Moral Majority.

Liberals also criticize the groups' conservative stance on seemingly secular issues like the SALT II treaty.

William Billings, executive director of the National Christian Action Coalition, insists the evangelicals' interest in defense matters is relevant.

It relates to the security of believers in Communist countries and the safety of Christian missionaries abroad, he said.

NEXT IN THE ATLANTA JOURNAL: The campaign plan to "turn this country around."